DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 974 PS 024 613

AUTHOR	Putkiewicz, Elzbieta
TITLE	Culture and the Kindergarten Curriculum in Poland.
PUB DATE	Apr 96
NOTE	15p.; Paper presented at the European Conference on the Quality of Early Childhood Education (6th, Lisbon, Portugal, September 1-4, 1996).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Capitalism; Classroom Communication; Classroom Environment; Communism; *Cultural Context; Cultural Influences; Curriculum Development; Democracy; Educational Change; Educational Environment; Foreign Countries; Government (Administrative Body); *Kindergarten; Parent Participation; Parent School Relationship; Political Influences; Preschool Education; Social Change; Social Influences; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	Poland

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the effect of cultural context on the content of kindergarten curriculum in Poland, chronicling the historical changes from Communist to post-Soviet, capitalist cultures. Soviet cultural influence on early childhood education from 1945 to 1989 is described as affecting a single obligatory curriculum, strict government control, limited parental involvement, direct instruction, nationalist activities, and ideological indoctrination. The paper notes that the developing pluralism of the 1970s and 1980s did not affect the uniform state cultural policy in the schools because of strict tutorial control, limited parental involvement, and a parental belief in the survival of Polish family values--which was encouraged by the Church. The paper presents changes in the educational curriculum in kindergartens in the 1990s, including policy documents that became invalid and changes in minimum standards for education. The general assumptions and program content, including physical education, child/family/environment relations, and cognitive and creative development, of these new education standards are outlined. Changes are reported in classroom instruction, particularly greater communication between teacher and students, more small group and individual work, and less formal discipline. Also noted are the increasing role of religion in the schools, greater parental participation, and new civic schools, including Jewish schools. Finally, the paper briefly describes a study of teacher attitudes, revealing a mixture of hope and anxiety, and mixed feelings about the loss of state control, greater teacher autonomy, and parental participation. (Two hundred and nine teachers participated. (JPB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Elżbieta Putkiewicz
Warsaw University
02-670 Warszawa
Puławska 234/42

ED 409 974

Culture and the Kindergarten Curriculum in Poland

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elzbieta
Putkiewicz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PS 024613

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Culture and the Kindergarten Curriculum in Poland

It will not be a great discovery if we state that the events taking place in Poland in recent five or even ten years constitute a slow emergence of post-communist culture, being a particular synthesis of old and new traditions, internal, local circumstances and global influences. Much of what is going on falls under the existing explanatory schemes and could be interpreted by existing models. This, however, would be a tough task.

The whole world of everyday life is changing. People wear and eat different things than they used to. They read different books, watch different films and get different presents for Christmas. Attitudes, motivation and believes change. Especially different in comparison with 20 or 10 years ago are the dreams of parents concerning the career of their children. None of parents of kindergarten or school kids asked about the dreamt about career for their offspring talk of "small stabilization". They link the future of their children with market, democratic, pluralistic direction although they themselves have still a lot of habits and reflexes of "homo sovieticus" (Putkiewicz, Wilkomirska, Zielińska 1993,1994).

In order to understand what is going on in Polish education today one should have a closer look at the recent history.

The Content of Early Childhood Programs in years 1945-89 and their cultural context.

Cultural landscape of Poland of those years has never been uniform. The analysis borrowed from Daniel Bell (1976) enables one to deal with culture as a kind of cultural entity, as a *collection of institutions and their both official and oppositional arrangements. The first group are strictly institutions controlled by the state gathering creators of culture, schools and kindergartens. The other consists of institutions and initiatives which broke free from state influence and control* or emerged as a force opposed to the state.

Both groups of institutions can take credit for Poland that was literate, visited museums and theaters, the country that in the 60-ties had the best TV plays in the world. There were main architects of Polish culture: the scarce "old" intelligentsia that survived the Second World War, much institutionalized by the Church and

sticking to the remains of their own associations and clubs of the period between the wars; and the "new" inteligentsia, in its emergence connected to the Communist party and its governmental and economic apparatus (Kurczewska 1993 (a)). The birth of "new intelligentsia" should be linked to the process of deserting the Communist party, revisionist processes in its ranks, which very quickly turned into opposing movements especially after 1968. This is when underground publishing houses, "flying universities", catholic communal movements emerged. A very important role was also played by those institutions controlled by the state that gathered artists. These were all exclusive movements and initiatives. However, they were also the ones that declared cultural equality of "joining together the bottom with the top of social strata, the East and the West, the past and the future, utopia with public service" (Kurczewska 1993 (b)).

What was going on in schools and kindergartens in years 1945-1989?Throughout those years they were influenced by organized socialism, in spite of the fact that in other areas, especially after 1968, one can see a clear deterioration of this cultural project. Kindergartens and primary schools are institutions strictly controlled by the government. Parents can enter them just a few times a year.

In all Polish kindergartens there is a single obligatory curriculum. Especially from the beginning of the 70-ties the main stress is put on education and intellectual development of children. 4- and 5-year-olds participate twice a day in formal classes that last 15, 20 or even 25 minutes. According to modernist project, and more precisely, to its East-European version[1], there is a"body discipline", silence and order. The lessons are taught through direct instruction. Content of programs is full of expressions like "inculcation of the ideals of socialist humanism", "rational and emotional ties between children and the Fatherland as well as countries of socialist commonwealth"[2] etc. Children learn songs about the Soviet Union, worship militiamen, soldiers, celebrate 1 May. A similar mode of school education is still maintained in China (Spodek, Saracho 1990) and North Korea. The difference is that in such countries as Poland or Hungary communist "customs" were cultivated only in kindergartens. In People's China and especially in North Korea, tights rows of thousands of kindergarten kids still participate in mass marches of 1st May etc., events in praise of "great leaders".

---

[1]An important difference between East- and West-European modernism is the fact that the East-European one rejected western competitiveness for the sake of collectivism.

[2]Compare programs introduced by the decision of the ministry of Education of 11 May 1973, 8 March 1977, 22 June 1981

One should ask a question why in the face of spontaneously developing pluralism of the 70-ties and 80-ties kindergartens and schools were still a stronghold of uniform cultural policy of the state? The answer is simple. Firstly, the government treated kindergartens and schools as institutions equally important as the militia and army. In order to control them it developed a powerful and omnipotent tutorial supervision. Secondly, parents did not join into the process of kindergarten education. Kindergarten seemed to them to be a bureaucratic institution that does not require man to get fully involved and gives one some superficial freedom. Parents tired with communist everyday reality were looking forward to this freedom. It is especially true about mothers burdened with both work and household. Thirdly, parents believed that the true "values of Polish family" will survive "despite everything". In this faith parents were supported by the Church which instead of encouraging them to fight this "schizophrenia" (different things are "sacred" in the kindergarten than at home) encouraged parents to send children to the church for catechization. Of equal importance is the fact that kindergarten teachers are usually accidental persons. Thus we encountered a typical "negative selection" for the underpaid job that also did not enjoy a public respect.

Changes in educational curriculum in kindergartens in the nineties

The following documents ceased to be valid beginning from 11 April 1992:

- The above-mentioned educational curriculum in kindergartens that had been introduced by the decision of the Ministry of Education of 11 May 1973 (No KO-410-3/73);
- Educational curriculum for 6-year-olds introduced by the decision of the Ministry of Education of 8 March 1977 (No PN-1-41-1/77);
- Instruction concerning the educational curriculum for 6-year-olds introduced by the decision of the Ministry of 22 June 1981 (No KO-410-4/81).

Minimum standards for education in kindergartens were introduced which included the contents of education focused around the following issues of education:

I Health and locomotion activities

II Child - family - environment

III Esthetics and creative activity

Minimum standards for kindergarten education of 3- to 6-year -olds

I. General Assumptions.

1. Development of a child is the primary value of kindergarten education.
2. Kindergartens fulfil their tasks in close collaboration with the family thus aiding its efforts of educating a child.
3. The main directions of educational work of kindergartens should be determined by the development needs and abilities of the children, as well as needs of the community. In her/his work the teacher should in particular:
   1) take care of children health and safety,
   2) support cognitive activities of the child aimed at getting to know itself, the surrounding social, cultural and natural reality that enrich its personal experience,
   3) initiate the feeling of child's identity with models and norms of behavior and teach the child co-responsibility for its behavior,
   4) provide conditions for development of the child's potential thus preparing it for taking advantage of school education,
   5) exert special care over disabled children requiring stimulating and compensating actions as well as satisfy the needs of the more gifted and interested children.

II. Contents of programs

Health - locomotive activities - physical development

1. Learning and observing principles of safety on kindergarten premises and outside with a particular stress on fundamental principles of crossing roads.
2. Building the awareness concerning health and threats to it.
3. Developing habits related to protection of health, personal hygiene and everyday hygiene.
4. Developing correct physical stature.
5. Realizing expression and locomotive efficiency through games and exercises - organized and those undertaken spontaneously by children.

Child - family - environment

1. Developing a positive self-image through recognition and expression of own feelings, acknowledging own problems and capabilities.
2. Strengthening emotional ties with the family.
3. Inspiring active attitude in a child towards the environment in direct contacts with nature and social life of the closest surrounding.
4. Awakening a feeling of ties with the home country and mankind.

Intellectual activity - mental development

1. Getting to know the social, technical and natural environment, acquiring particular experience, knowledge and practical skills.

2. Development of speech and thinking in children during games and classes and in particular:
   - developing linguistic skills: enriching the vocabulary, phonetic and grammatical efficiency, expressing relations, carrying on the dialogue, putting stories together, expressing feelings,
   - developing mental skills: comparing, classifying, analysis, synthesis, generalization and concluding.

3. Creating educational situations conducive to acquiring and developing skills of writing and reading and in particular:
   - developing motivation for reading on one's own,
   - developing visual and aural perceptiveness,
   - teaching the concept of graphic symbol,
   - recognition of both printed and handwritten letters, both upper- and lowercase,
   - perfecting spatial orientation,
   - perfecting manual efficiency during various activities as well as organized exercises,
   - reading words, sentences and short texts,
   - attempts at writing made by children.

4. Developing elementary mathematical concepts concerning:
   - orientation in space, size of objects, assessing weight, volume and time,
   - getting to know geometrical figures,
   - creating classes, their qualitative and quantitative classification,
   - adding and subtracting natural numbers in the range to 10 (using symbols).

Aesthetic sensitivity - creative activity

1. Awakening aesthetic sensitivity in children in contacts with nature, technic, art.
2. Facilitating to children the contact with literature, theater, arts, film, music.
3. Developing various forms of children creativity including attempts at joining various kinds of verbal, locomotive, musical and artistic expression.
4. Developing the ability to use various materials, tools, accessories in artistic and constructive activities.
5. Accustoming children with organization and performance of work.

The minimum was welcomed by kindergarten teachers. The study I carried out in November 1994 reveals that 79% (n=248) of them value very highly autonomy in the interpretation of contents of education which enables flexibility in teaching children. 37%, however, would prefer the decision of the Ministry of Education to provide for standards for children achievements instead od contents framework. Teachers see the existence of standards as pre-conditions facilitating dialogue with "pedagogical supervision" since all teachers point to the fact that curricular autonomy is not understood by the so-called "methodological consultants". Paradoxically, they demand work complying with the previous resolutions (e.g.: of 1973, 1977), that is:

- classes lasting more than ten minutes,
- highly bureaucratic system of making detailes notes in the so-called class diary, splitting complex subjects into parts concerning language, mathematics etc.

The "rigidity" of pedagogical supervision is clearly a communist heritage.

Observations of kindergarten classes (conducted in October and November 1994 in 6 kindergartens) reveal that teachers actually do use varied methods of work and games for children. They do not force,

however, children to work together; just encourage them. In 20 observed classes I noted only 2 regular, 20-minute ones, conducted for the whole class of 5-year-olds. In similar observations conducted in 1984, regular classes were conducted twice a day for each group of kids and always proudly shown to visitors to kindergartens. That was probably why I saw then 16 formal classes in 20 observed.

Today the character of classes for 6-year-olds has also changed. There are more regular classes than for groups of 5-year-olds. However, they are conducted in an entertaining way with children working in groups of 4 or 5; there are a lot of educational games, music, movement, little of direct instruction. Classes for 6-year-olds in 1984 were in no way different from regular classes in schools. Being conducted in a kindergarten they were only taking place in a more friendly environment. Below are 2 typical classes for 6-year-olds today:

(1) motorial recreation with music (children dance and sing a folk song);

(2) educational game "Pictures and letters" with children playing in teams of 10 with teacher facilitating;

(3) chatting about the film titled "Lion king" watched together;

(4) painting pictures illustrating selected scenes form the film.

Children are free to do what they want. They are not forced to participate in games. One can be in a temper. 3 boys who feel angry do not want to dance. The teachers talks to them quietly and then leaves them alone. After a few minutes the boys join other children. Situations like this one repeat a few times. No trace of 1984 discipline. Children are mobile, talk a lot with one another, interrupt the teacher. The teacher tries to intervene when they do not listen to what others say: "... listen to Jasiek, he speaks more slowly than you do...". Among children there are four clearly handicapped. This kindergarten implements the integrative project - a novelty in Polish education.

In the room there are a lot of toys brought in by children (kindergartens used to buy toys; now they have no money). In a big box there are two tortoises trotting around; in spare time kids wash and feed them. When children draw, the teacher plays accompanying soft music from a cassette. Children sing and murmur.

In order to have a closer look at the curriculum which I understand as a set of planned experiences which provide children with opportunities for learning in a school setting (Spodek, 1985) I carried a quantitative analysis of the process of communication between the teacher and children through Bales method

(1950). I compare the outcome of November 1994 study with that of 1984. All categories in Bales scheme are definied operationally - which much facilitates observations. Here is the scheme itself:

A	Social-emotional area: positive responses	1	Indicates solidarity in attitude towards others, praises others, supports, rewards
		2	Relieves tensions, makes jokes, laughs, shows contentedness
		3	Agrees, accepts passively others' ideas, shares opinions of others, subordinates himself
B	Task area: attempts at answers	4	Offers new ideas, suggests solutions at the same time leaving a choice
		5	States opinions, evaluates, analyzes, expresses feelings and wishes
		6	Guides, informs, repeats, explains, confirms
C	Task area: questions, requests	7	Asks for new ideas, information, repetition or clarification
		8	Asks for opinions, evaluation, analysis, expression of feelings
		9	Asks for suggestions, directions, possible courses of action to be taken
D	Social and emotional area: negative responses	10	Disagrees, rejects stubbornly, formalizes, denies help
		11	Displays tensions, asks for help and withdraws
		12	Antagonizes, questions the position of others, seeks recognition

Both in 1984 and 1994 I analized 20 time samples each time.

I present the results of the observation in the table below:

Category of statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Teacher and 5- or 6-year-olds (1984)	12.1	12.1	3.0	10.0	8.0	30.1	14.0	4.2	4.0	1.0	1.0	0
Teacher and 5- or 6-year-olds (1994)	10.2	10.0	0.7	11.4	7.0	18.9	8.0	8.7	8.1	7.0	8.0	2.0
Teacher and 7- to 9-year-olds in school (for the sake of comparison)	9.0	10.0	2.0	10.0	8.0	33.0	18.0	4.0	4.0	0	0	2.0

Results of observations of 1984 given after (Putkiewicz 1990)

Similarities in distributions coming from observations in kindergartens in 1984 and observations of school classes are clearly visible. The dominating category of statements was information-giving, repeating, explaining (6); that is all elements constituting direct instruction.

Bales' distribution of teacher's and children statements in kindergartens in 1994 is different. One can find definitely less information-giving, repeating, explaining (category 6), more questions for opinions,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

evaluating (category 8), requests for determining the direction for problem-solving (category 9). More negative behaviors among children who behave in an unrestrained manner, disagree, are in a temper.

Kindergarten communication reminds much less of formalized school cultural message. It is more like family education, where there is no explicitly defined set of rules governing the teaching process. One can also notice that the kindergarten of today much less than 10 years ago is an institution disposed towards children. There are much fewer formal classes where everybody are forced to do the same thing simultaneously. There is much more work in small groups (of 4 or 5) and individual work; less formal discipline.

Come-back of Religion

Eighties mark the return of Poland to history and historical memory. The return to history was accompanied by return to religion which in Eastern Europe is closely linked with ethnic and national awareness. Another important factor was the appointment of a Pole for the Pope. Many politicians considered this fact to be an event to turn the current of history. Thus we are experiencing the renaissance of religious feelings but also of the Church as an institution which considers formal criterion as the sole criterion of christianity. In kindergartens and schools appeared religious instruction classes. Religion in the kindergarten does not play such an important role as in schools but it poses many problems which the priest-philosopher Józef Tischner (1994) describes in the following way: "numerous teachers of religion think that it is their vocation to shape the world according to the gospel instead of discovering how God shaped it..."

Parents in the kindergarten and civic kindergartens

The idea of the civic school and kindergarten was born in Poland in the early eighties in the intellectual circles associated with the "Solidarity" movement represented by parents and teachers. The first schools were created after martial law was lifted in the years 1988-1989 i.e.: in the late period of communism in Poland. Their creators' opinions were shaped under pressure of the historical process which was very basic for our country: opposition to communism. Civic schools were therefore a phase in the war against the single standard system of values forced upon all areas of social life.

Civic education was also being formed in the context of a broader pedagogical discussion. The monolithic character and lack of flexibility of the institution of the school and its programs were criticized. The organizers shared a general conviction regarding impossibility of constructing universal knowledge, lack of unity of experiences, impossibility of finding a sole answer to every question etc. These problems were discussed at the weekly meetings of the main architects of civic schools, at the University of Warsaw and the First Civic General Secondary School (High School) (1988 and 1989). It appears that these were the first Polish public discussions on the practical aspects of new pedagogical thought which we would call today a post-modernist one. It was assumed that the civic schooling system will form a network of schools and kindergartens with alterative, local teaching programs and teachers with great autonomy.

Initially most of the civic schools and kindergartens were created in the "bedrooms" of large cities, in intellectual centers consolidated after the oppressive, negative experiences of martial law. This also happened in the smaller cities or everywhere where there was a general lack of state schools and kindergartens or where the alternative were schools working in three shifts and with large classes.

Today, in 1994, there are over 400 civic schools and kindergartens operating. This is accompanied by a civic movement consisting of several tens of thousands of people. The movement is not very uniform with respect to its ideology and goals. Its development is one of the indicators of the institutional revolution of the state, the economy and culture initiated in 1989 and leading in the direction of democracy and a market economy at the same time undermining the dichotomy of state - civic society. Civic kindergartens and schools are new institutions of such a society. They are usually created by associations and foundations. They have developed a model of co-operation between parents and teachers who together create the ideas and reality of the schools and in many cases "adapt" them to the needs of the local community.

An example of a fairly typical civic school is the Lauder - Morasha School thus characterized by Ruth E. Gruber (Daily News Bulletin April 22, 1994):

WARSAW TO GET JEWISH SCHOOL FOR FIRST TIME IN A GENERATION

By Ruth E. Gruber

WARSAW, April 21 (JTA) - For the first time in a generation, Warsaw will have a Jewish elementary school, starting next September.

The formal announcement of the school's opening was made here last week.

The non-profit, private school will be established by the Roland S. Lauder Foundation and called the Lauder-Morasha School. It will join schools sponsored by the foundation established in Budapest and Vienna.

"I am thrilled that with this project we are bridging the past and the future," Ronald Lauder, who established the foundation, said in a message read at the announcement ceremony.

"This school gives us a wonderful opportunity to transmit the legacy of Jewish tradition and learning to this community," said Lauder, a former U.S. ambassador to Austria.

During his porting to Vienna, Lauder became deeply interested in his Jewish roots and in preserving Jewish religion and culture in Eastern and Central Europe.

"When we send our children to school, we trust that what they learn will enable them to build a better world for all," he said in his message. "Therefore I pledge in the name of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation to keep this heritage alive in our children."

Committed to See School Thrive

"And you have my word that I am personally committed to seeing the Lauder-Morasha School grow and thrive," he said.

The school's director will be Helise Lieberman. She said the curriculum will offer the basic requirements of Polish primary schools and meet the standards set by the Ministry of Education.

It will also, she said, include the teaching of Hebrew and English, a s well as classes in Jewish tradition and culture. In addition, there will be classes in computers, music, fine arts, theater art and sports, and numerous after-school activities.

"The school will provide the opportunity for our children to learn what it is to be Jewish in Poland today," she said.

The school has been functioning since September 1 1994. It is attended by 20 children aged 6 and 7. Some of them come from Jewish families. (Estimates of the number of Jews in Poland today range from 10.000 to three or three times that number). Others come from Polish families without Jewish roots. Classes are conducted in a both free and interesting way. Credit for this must be largely taken by the headmistress and teachers who have their own alternative idea how to educate children.

Civic schools and kindergartens are a new phenomenon under Polish system of education. We are interested in the opinions of schoolteachers about these schools and kindergartens and, indirectly, in their attitude towards changes in the system of education in Poland. I carried out my study in 1994 (Dolata, Putkiewicz, Murawska, Żytko 1994).

The study encompassed 209 teachers (93.8 per cent women and 6 per cent men), students of the Pedagogical Department of the University of Warsaw. In this group, 61.7 per cent consisted of teachers completing extra-mural master's degree studies, employed in kindergartens and elementary schools, and 38.3 percent were teachers with various qualifications attending post-graduate studies.

The analysis allows us to formulate the position of teachers in relation to the educational changes in Poland. The opinions of teachers are characterized by a trend of criticism and affirmation. The teachers do not discard civic kindergartens and schools entirely, nor do they fully accept them. In their opinion, hope intermingles with a feeling of threat. They are worried about the state losing control over education, the undermining of their authority in the education process and lowering of school discipline. But they hope that working conditions in schools will improve, that teachers' autonomy will increase, that parents will participate in the education of their children. Some teachers believe that the existence of civic schools creates more threats than hopes; there are others who see more opportunities for changing education than threats. The former feel that changes in education are inevitable, but are worried about losing their hitherto maintained stabilization. For the latter hopes for valuable changes in education outweigh the risks, but they are aware that one cannot fully discard the solutions which have existed up to now.

References

1. Balees R.F. , 1950 Interaction Process Analysis. Cambridge Mass. Addison Wesley

2. Bell D., 1976, The Cultural Contradictioins of Capitalism, London.

3. Dolata R., Murawska B., Putkiewicz E., Żytko M., 1994, Teachers' Opinions about Civic Schools in Poland. Fourth Eoropean Conference on the Quality of Earth Childhood Education. September 1-3, 1994 Geteborg.

4. Kurczewska J., 1993 (a) Kulturowe tradycje realnego socjalizmu. in Kulturowy wymiar przemian społecznych. Jawłowska A. ed Warszawa, Polska Akademia Nauk.

5. Kurczewska J., 1993 (b) Inteligencja polska: schodzenie ze sceny. Krytyka 40., Warszawa, Nowa

6. Putkiewicz E., 1990, Proces komunikowania się na lekcji. Warszawa, WSiP

7. Putkiewicz E., Wilkomirska A., Zielińska A., 1993, Teachers at Risk. NESA Conference Budapest, September 15-19.

8. Putkiewicz E., Wilkomirska A., Zielińska A., 1994, Rodzice, nauczyciele i młodzież w nowej rzeczywistości in Uczestnicy procesu dydaktycznego. Półturzycki J., ed. Toruń, Adam Marszałek.

9. Spodek B., 1985, Teaching in the Early Years. Engelwood Clifs, NJ.

10. Tischner J., Michnik A., 1994, Między panem a plebanem, Gazeta Wyborcza Nr 229 (1683)